

Islamic Knowledge The Gateway To Success

We start with the name of *Allāh*. We praise *Allāh* and thank Him for the blessings of *Islām*. We humbly ask *Allāh* to raise the rank of our Prophet *Muḥammad*, and his kind *Al* and Companion and to protect his nation from that which he fears for it. We ask *Allāh* to grant us the proper intention, the Comprehension, and the reward in the Hereafter. Thereafter:

Knowledge is the gateway to success, as known by many. However, some people understand this statement differently. The Islamic definition and concept of knowledge, and how it is a gateway to success in this world and in the Hereafter, is an ambiguous matter to many people. God willing, we hope to clarify this ambiguity hereinafter.

Know, may *Allāh* have mercy on you that the high status of knowledge has been clearly established in *Islām* through explicit texts in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* as well as in the writings of the scholars of *Islām*. *Allāh* said in *Surat al-Mujādalah*, *Ayah 11*:

﴿يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾

which means: [*Allāh* raises the ranks of those among you who believe and those who were granted the knowledge.] Also, *Allāh* said in *Surat az-Zumar*, *Ayah 9*:



which means: [Those who know are not the same as those who do not know.] In *Surat Fatir*, *Ayah 28*, *Allāh* said:



which means: [The true religious scholars fear *Allāh* the most.] The Prophet ﷺ, who is the best of the creation, in his *hadith* related by *at-Tirmidhiyy*, said:

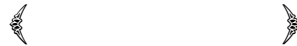
فَضْلُ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِي عَلَى أَدْنَاكُمْ

which means: <<The rank of the scholar compared to that of the worshipper is like my rank to the lowest of you>>. The difference in merit between the Prophet ﷺ and the lowest Muslim is extremely great. Likewise is the difference between the true scholar and the true worshipper, i.e., the scholar

who satisfied the conditions of being a scholar, and the worshipper who satisfied the conditions and integrals of worshipping.

Imam ^Aliyy Ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph, said: <<Knowledge is better than money, because knowledge protects you whereas you protect money.>> Knowledge rules over things, whereas money is ruled over. Money diminishes as you spend it, whereas spending the knowledge by teaching it to others increases your reward.

In *Islam*, the issue of knowledge is held in high regard. This knowledge is not any knowledge per se, but rather, the knowledge of the Religion of *Islam*. In *Surat Muḥammad*, *Ayah* 19, *Allāh* said:



which means: [O *Muḥammad*, be firm in knowing that no one is God except *Allāh*.] In the *ḥadīth* related by *al-Bayhaḡiyy*, the Messenger of *Allāh* ﷺ said:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

which means: <<Seeking the knowledge of the Religion is obligatory on every Muslim (whether male or female).>>

The wording of this *ḥadīth* the term <<every>> (*kull*) from which the scholars clearly understood <<the Personal Obligatory Knowledge of the Religion,>> and not all kinds of knowledge. Had every kind of knowledge been obligatory on every male and every female, it would have been a hardship beyond one's ability, and *Allāh* does not order anyone with what one cannot bear.

Imam Abul-Ḥasan al-Ash^ariyy said: <<The first obligation on the slave is to learn about *Allāh*, His Messenger, and His Religion.>> The Prophet ﷺ, in the *ḥadīth* related by *al-Bukḡariyy*, said:

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ

which means: <<Whomever *Allāh* willed goodness for makes him knowledgeable in the Religion.>> It is also understood from this *ḥadīth* that whomever *Allāh* did not will for him to be knowledgeable enough in the Religion, then *Allāh* did not will a good status for him.

Hence, it is clear from what has been stated so far, that the knowledge we are referring to is the Religious knowledge of *Islam*. Moreover, this knowledge of the Religion entails many facets and many subjects among which are the knowledge of *Tawḡid* and the knowledge of the rules of the Religion. The knowledge of *Tawḡid* entails knowing about *Allāh* and His Messenger, and it is the best of all the knowledge in *Islam*. The scholars repeatedly emphasized the clear evidence from the *Qur'an*, *Ḥadīth*, and scholarly consensus proving the knowledge of *Tawḡid* is ranked the highest among all knowledge. This is so, because it has to do with knowing about *Allāh* and about His Messenger. This entails knowing what befits *Allāh* and

what is impossible to be among His attributes, and what befits the messengers and what is impossible to be among their attributes. *Abu Hanifah* said: << *Tawhid* is the <<Great knowledge (*al-Fiqhul-Akbar*).>> *Imam ash-Shafi'iy* said: <<I mastered the knowledge of *Tawhid* before mastering the knowledge of the rules of the Religion.>>

This knowledge of *Tawhid* is of two categories. The first category is that which is obligatory on every accountable person⁽¹⁾. The accountable person is obligated to know this knowledge; hence, this category is classified among the Personal Obligatory Knowledge. Examples of this knowledge include the belief in *Allah* and the belief in His angels, His books, His Messengers, the Day of Judgment, destiny, and the like. The second category of this knowledge of *Tawhid* is that which is obligatory for some Muslims to master, but not all Muslims. This obligation is classified as a communal obligation, since if some of the Muslims have that knowledge obtaining it is no longer an obligation on the rest of the community. Examples of this category is for one to learn the proofs of the tenets of belief from the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, and intellect to enable one to refute the claims of the enemies of *Islam*, like the communists and the innovators of misguidance. Also, among the communal obligations is that some Muslims must acquire the sciences Muslims need, such as medicine, engineering, agriculture, and the like. Hence, if enough Muslims learn these sciences such that they satisfy the need of the community, it is no longer obligatory on the others.

The first category of the knowledge of *Tawhid*, the personal obligation, has two subdivisions. The first subdivision entails knowing correctly about *Allah* and His Messenger and believing in it beyond doubt. If one does not know and believe this, one will not be a Muslim, and one who dies as such will not escape the everlasting tortures of Hellfire. However, having satisfied this and having uttered the Testification of Faith at least once in one's lifetime, but failing to obtain other essentials of belief and to fulfill other obligations, such as fasting and praying and the like, one becomes a sinful Muslim, provided one does not deny the obligation of fasting, praying, and the like⁽²⁾.

The second subdivision entails learning the thirteen attributes of the Self of *Allah* which are obligatory on every accountable person to know, and learning the attributes of the prophets and believing in what they taught regarding the angels of *Allah*, the Books of *Allah*, the Messenger of *Allah*, the Day of Judgment, destiny, whether good or evil - Paradise, and the like.

As to the rules of the Religion, part of this knowledge is a personal obligation. The Muslim who is accountable is obligated to learn the matters of Purification (*Taharah*), the rules of prayers, the rules of fasting, and the rules

¹ The accountable person is the one who is pubescent, sane, and has heard the Testification of Faith in a language one understands.

² Note: Denying these commonly known obligations renders the person non-Muslim.

of other obligations that apply to him, including *Zakah*, Pilgrimage, dealings, sins of the body, and the like.

Learning the Obligatory Knowledge of the Religion makes one able to discriminate between what is lawful (*halal*) and what is unlawful (*haram*), what is valid and what is invalid, what is acceptable and what is rejected, in addition to what is classified under the Religion as good or bad. The scholars of *Islam* have spoken explicitly about these criteria. In the chapter entitled <<Knowledge Before Saying or Committing Action,>> *Imam al-Bukhariyy* stated: <<If one acquires the Obligatory knowledge of the Religion, one acquires the ability to differentiate between what is lawful and what is unlawful, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, and what is good and what is evil.>>

Allah said in the *Qur'an* in *Surat at-Tahrim*, *Ayah* 6:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ﴾

which means: [O believers, protect yourselves and your families from Hellfire which is fueled by people and stones.] *Imam^Ata' Ibn Abi Rabah* who was among the followers of the Companions, interpreted that verse of the *Qur'an*. He said: <<One protects himself and his family from the tortures of Hellfire by learning how to pray, fast, sell, buy, marry, and divorce.>>

Allah said in *Surat adh-Dhariyat*, *Ayah* 56:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

which means: [I created the *jinn* and humans to order them with worship.] We have been created to be ordered to worship *Allah*. Worshipping *Allah* requires knowledge. For one to have a valid worship, first one must have the correct belief in *Allah*. *Imam al-Ghazaliyy* said: <<The worship is only valid after knowing correctly about *Allah*.>> Hence, if one learns that knowledge of the Religion, one will know how to perform the worship; one will know what is lawful and what is unlawful and what is acceptable and what is not. By implementing this knowledge accordingly, one earns the reward on the Day of Judgment. This knowledge is not limited to particular groups of people. All people are in need of this knowledge to carry out their tasks in compliance with the rules of *Allah*. This includes parents, teachers, carpenters, doctors, engineers, and others.

Acquiring this knowledge is very important and entails certain essential criteria. Among the criteria for acquiring the knowledge is to be sincere to *Allah* in one's endeavor. To acquire the knowledge for the sake of showing off or to be recognized by people as knowledgeable or for other worldly interests renders one sinful and a loser. The one who truly wants to acquire the knowledge needs to do that in sincerity to *Allah* as it is evident in the following *hadith* of the Prophet that was related by *al-Hakim*:

الرجلُ يبتغى الأجرَ والذكرَ ما له قال رسولُ الله ﷺ: " () . :
 ."

which means: <<Once a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him about the one who does a deed hoping for reward from *Allah* and hoping to be recognized by the people. The Prophet ﷺ replied, <<One does not have any reward for that doing.>> The question was posed three times, and three times the Prophet ﷺ gave the same answer. Then the Prophet ﷺ said: << *Allah* does not accept the deeds unless they are done in sincerity for Him.>> When one is doing the good one must seek the reward only from *Allah*.

Another criterion for acquiring the knowledge is for one to receive it from knowledgeable people, and not by merely reading books. The scholars of *Islam*, like *al-Khatib al-Baghdadiyy*, explicitly stated: <<The knowledge is taken from the mouths of the scholars and not from the pages of books.>> The reasons are clear: one cannot ask a book about an ambiguity and receive a clarification. Even a scholar might have a slip of the pen and write in his book an incorrect statement that he did not intend to write; some of scholars' writings did not escape the perversions of innovators of misguidance who planted errors in them. However, if one studied with a qualified teacher, the teacher would draw one's attention to such matters. As related by *at-Tirmidhiyy*, the Prophet ﷺ said:

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

which means: << *Allah* facilitates a route to Paradise for the one who follows a route seeking the knowledge of the Religion.>>

Another criterion for acquiring the knowledge is to be neither shy nor arrogant in acquiring that knowledge. *Imam Mujahid*, who was a follower of the Companions (*Tabi^un*), said: <<The one who is shy or arrogant does not acquire the knowledge.>> Hence, the one who wants to acquire the knowledge and arrive at the truth of a matter should neither be shy in acquiring the knowledge nor arrogant. One must acquire the knowledge in order to gain the benefit, regardless of one's age or social status.

In praising the women of the *Ansar*, Lady *^A'ishah* said:

نَعْمُ النِّسَاءُ الْأَنْصَارُ، لَمْ يَمْنَعُهُنَّ الْحَيَاءُ أَنْ يَتَفَقَّهْنَ فِي الدِّينِ

which means: <<Praised are the women of the *Ansar*³, their shyness did not stop them from acquiring the knowledge of the Religion.>>

³ The *Ansar* are the people of *al-Madīnah* who supported the Prophet; those who received the Prophet in *al-Madīnah* when he immigrated there.

Also among the criteria for acquiring the knowledge is to take that knowledge from someone who has that knowledge, because he who does not have the knowledge cannot give it. In addition to this, that person must be trustworthy. Therefore, the knowledge is acquired from someone who is knowledgeable and trustworthy. In what was related by *Imam Muslim*, *Imam Ibn Sirin* said:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْعِلْمَ دِينٌ فَانظُرُوا عَمَّنْ تَأْخُذُونَ دِينَكُمْ

which means: <<This knowledge is Religion, so watch from whom you take your Religion.>> One should stop for a moment and remind oneself of far simpler matters. If one was seeking a particular university, one would spend a great deal of time looking into and checking the different ranks of universities to determine which was better. If one needed a treatment from a doctor, one would usually look for a recognized specialist. If one wanted a house to be built, one would search for the best qualified in that field. Most definitely, the knowledge of the Religion is of a far higher priority, and one needs to check the person from whom to take the knowledge.

Those who seek the knowledge exert effort in acquiring that knowledge. In reviewing the biographies of the great scholars of *Islam*, one will find they traveled extensively and covered long distances at a time when no airplanes, cars, or luxury vessels existed. They used to ride a camel for months to cross the desert to get the answer to a single case, or to acquire one chapter of knowledge from trustworthy and knowledgeable teachers. *Ibn Rislan* said:

مَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ مُعَلِّمًا فَلْيُرْحَلْ

which means: <<If one does not find a teacher where one is residing, then let one go to where one can find a trustworthy, knowledgeable teacher.>>

Among the criteria for acquiring the knowledge is for the student to observe the proper manners with their teachers. This is part of acquiring the knowledge, and it has many secrets. This is why a person like *Imam ash-Shafi'iyy* turned the pages of his book so softly in the presence of his teacher, *Imam Malik*. To acquire the knowledge without disturbing his teacher, *Abdullah Ibn Abbas*, a family member of the Prophet ü used to wait without knocking at the door of another Companion, until that Companion came out.

Also among these criteria is for the knowledgeable person to implement that knowledge and perform according to it. *Al-Junayd al-Baghdadiyy* said a piece of poetry in Arabic that means: <<It is a great contravention to have a scholar who does not implement his knowledge and commits enormous sins instead. Worse than that, however, is a person drowning in ignorance who pretends to be a pious person.>>

The one who acquires the knowledge, satisfying the criteria for acquiring it usually becomes sincerely more humble. This humility is a sign of knowledge; it is in the heart and it appears on the outside. Yet, the humility of the heart entails more than talking softly or lowering one's gaze in a shy manner. Some

frauds talk softly and lower their gazes in a shy manner, yet their hearts are like stone. The more knowledgeable one is, the more aware one becomes of the greatness of the Creator and the smallness of one's self, and the more aware of the fact that one acquired only the knowledge which *Allāh* enabled one to acquire.

Imām Aḥmad ar-Rifāʿiyy, may *Allāh* raise his rank, sometimes had 100,000 people in his session who, by the will of *Allāh*, would hear his lesson without the aid of audio equipment. Out of humility, he used to say about himself: <<I am no one.>>

Imām ʿAlīyy said: <<The people of knowledge are of three categories: First, a scholar who implements his knowledge, the one who has observed the criteria for acquiring the knowledge, and implementing it. The second is the person who learns and is on the path of success; he is the one who learns following the proper methodology, implementing the rules, and observing the criteria. The third type of person is the one who does not have the knowledge; the one who does not seek to acquire the knowledge in the proper manner, but rather follows any speaker who says anything out of ignorance.>>

This third type runs rampant and is of great danger. We see many people stand on platforms and address masses of people, while they, themselves, are ignorant. They themselves are astray, and they lead others astray. This is of grave concern, and we need to be very cautious.

The cure for the agonies many of our communities face depends on the extent of our obedience to *Allāh* in applying the rules of the Religion. The one who learns the Religion and implements it satisfying the methodologies and criteria discussed above is pious and sincere. If such a person wants to marry, he conducts his marriage in a valid manner. He observes what is lawful and unlawful in the marital relationship; he fulfills his obligations, and he fears *Allāh*. Since he knows how to have a valid marriage contract, his children will not be a result of adultery. He eats and drinks what is lawful, dresses in what is lawful, and lives in a lawful place, because he differentiates between what is lawful and what is unlawful. He neither takes someone else's place by force nor cheats others, because he observes the rights of others. If he goes out to buy things, he does so in a lawful manner, because he learned how to transact business according to the rules of the Religion. He implements the great manners the Prophet ū taught. This person performs his Prayer in a valid way, because he knows what makes the Prayer acceptable to *Allāh*. Likewise, his Fasting, Dry Purification (*Tayammum*), Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), Purification, and other aspects will be performed in a valid manner. He does all of that with sincerity to *Allāh*, because he knows this is a condition for earning the reward, the blessings, and the benefits in this life and in the Hereafter.

Once the members of the community attain these qualities, the relationships that govern them will improve, and the society at large will improve. The wealthy person who is sincere and knowledgeable will spend in the ways of *Allāh* - out of generosity and love, and seeking the reward from *Allāh*. Also,

the one who is poor, like other pious people who are poor, will be patient and have complete reliance on *Allah*. They would implement the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ:

لو أنكم تَوَكَّلْتُمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ حَقَّ تَوَكُّلِهِ لَرَزَقْنَاكُمْ كَمَا يَرْزُقُ الطَّيْرَ تَغْدُو خِمَاصًا وَتَرْجِعُ
بَطَانًا

which means: <<If you rely on *Allah* perfectly, then *Allah* will sustain you and provide for you as He provides for the birds. The birds fly away from their nests in the morning hungry, yet they return with full stomach.>> *Allah* will provide for the one who is poor and sincere, and has the proper reliance on *Allah*, just as He provides for the birds.

Examples of success in this life are to have a valid marriage, buy and sell lawfully, be knowledgeable and implement the knowledge, and perform the Prayers, Fasting, and Pilgrimage in a valid manner. The one who is knowledgeable will be led by his knowledge to piety and sincerity. The one who is pious will fall under the *Qusdsiyy Hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ:

أَعَدَدْتُ لِعِبَادِي الصَّالِحِينَ مَا لَا عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ وَلَا أُذُنٌ سَمِعَتْ وَلَا خَطَرَ عَلَى قَلْبِ بَشَرٍ

which means: << *Allah* said: I prepared for My pious slaves in Paradise that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no one thought of before.>>

The ultimate success is to be successful in the Hereafter. The person who acquires the knowledge as it is prescribed in *Islam* enters the gateway to success in this life and in the Hereafter. So be eager to acquire that knowledge. Be eager to be around the scholars. Be eager to associate with the scholars, for the Messenger of *Allah* said:

إِنْ مَثَلَ الْعُلَمَاءِ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَثَلِ النُّجُومِ فِي السَّمَاءِ يُهْتَدَى بِهَا فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ
وَالْبَحْرِ

which means: <<The scholars on earth are like the stars in the heavens with which one is guided through the darkness of land and sea.>> *At-Tabaraniyy* related the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, in highlighting the importance of the scholars,

لَمُوتِ قَبِيلَةٍ أَيْسَرُ مِنْ مُوتِ عَالِمٍ

which means: <<The death of an entire tribe is easier than the death of one scholar.>>

Be warned of those ignorant people the Prophet ﷺ spoke about in his *hadith* related by *at-Tirmidhiyy*.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَقْبِضُ الْعِلْمَ يَنْتَزِعُهُ انْتِزَاعًا مِنْ بَيْنِ النَّاسِ، وَلَكِنْ يَقْبِضُ الْعِلْمَ بِقَبْضِ
الْعُلَمَاءِ، حَتَّى إِذَا لَمْ يَبْقَى عَالِمٌ اتَّخَذَ النَّاسُ رُؤَسَاءَ جُهَالًا فَاسْتَفْتَوْهُمْ فَضَلُّوا
وَأَضَلُّوا

which means: << *Allah* does not take away the knowledge by ordering it pulled out of the hearts of the people. Instead, *Allah* takes the knowledge away by making the scholars die. When no scholar remains, people take for themselves ignorant leaders whom they ask for religious answers. These leaders will answer them with ignorance, thus straying and leading them astray.>>

***Allah* knows best.**